Exploring the Influence of Managerial Humor on Innovative Behavior: Evidence from Thai Real Estate Firms

Dr. Chaiyaset Promsri
Faculty of Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract: This study aimed to explore the relationship between managerial humor and innovative behavior of managers in Thai real estate companies. Seventy-nine managers in all levels of two listed real estate companies in Thailand were gathered for data collection by using humor style questionnaire (HSQ) and innovative work behavior scale (IWB) as the instruments. The results of multiple regression analysis exhibited that humor styles of managers in these real estate companies could explain 23% of variance ($R^2 = .227$, $F (4, 79) = 5.446$, $p < .01$). The findings showed that affiliative humor style had a significantly positive influence on innovative behavior ($\beta = .280$, $p < .008$), as did self-enhancing humor style ($\beta = .279$, $p < .011$). In contrast, this present study did not find the significant relationships between negative humor styles and innovative behavior of Thai executives. Discussion and recommendations for a further research were also discussed.

Keywords: Humorous managers, Innovative behavior, Thai real estate firm.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies on the use of humor in the workplace have long been investigated in the past decades. In particular, various studies attempted to focus on the use of humor by managers that leads to the positive consequences for the organization such as increased job satisfaction, reduced workplace stress and conflict, maximized productivity, and improved creative working atmosphere [1- 4].

Decker [5] found the significant relationship between managerial humor and subordinate satisfaction. The more employees scored their supervisor high on using sense of humor, the higher rates were reported on their job satisfaction. Rizzo, Wanzer, and Booth-Butterfield [6] also examined that managers with high sense of humor were rated as more fond and more effective in their positions. However, humor is two-edged. If used improperly, humor can lead to negative outcomes for managers and organizations [7]. People with different personalities and backgrounds might perceive and construe humor in the different meaning as some humors come with connotation, thus humor needs to be used with carefulness [8]. Anderson [9] argued that if managers realized when and how to use humor in the right proportions, a sense of humor can be a powerful management tool. In the light of this, managerial humor is viewed as the critical factor for a manager to alter the working environment leading to creativity and innovation. To encourage organizational innovation, innovative behavior is a major driving force. Individuals with high innovative behavior are able to develop, adopt, and implement new ideas, products, processes, and procedures in order to make the differences.

Many studies explored the linkage between humor and creativity and innovation [10 -15]. Interestingly, these studies found that the use of managerial humor not only had a positive impact on innovative behavior, but also a negative effect depending on different contexts, cultures, and settings. Thus, to expand more understanding about the association between managerial humor usage and innovative behavior related to the dissimilar contexts, they suggested conducting further studies in the different settings.

In a highly turbulent competition, the real estate segment in Thailand has confronted numerous uncertainties influenced by political forces, economic forces, sociocultural forces, and technological forces. Various signals (e.g. increase in cost of operation, sales revenue, return rates and net profit) indicated the needs for adaptation and innovation enhancement. Even though a lot of studies attempted to search for ways to strengthen the performance of companies in this sector, the use of humor by managers that is associated with innovative behavior has been overlooked. Therefore, it is quite interesting to scrutinize the relationship between...
humor usages of managers and innovative behavior in real estate sector.

Based on the literature review, the focus on humor in the workplace in Thai context has been ignored. The suggestions of using humor in the organization can be found on Aurjiraponpan’s article [16] in which humor was proposed to use as a tool in nursing management. Moreover, no or little empirical evidences relating to the use of humor in the workplace have been investigated. Promsri [15] also pointed out that the exploration of the relationship between humor styles and innovative behavior in Thai context has been underdeveloped and needs to be extended to examine the differences of these factors compared to other cultures. Specifically, the focus on the managerial humor and innovative behavior is somewhat new in Thai context, and can fruitfully enhance the body of knowledge in the management field. Hence, this study aimed to explore the relationship between managerial humor based on the four humor styles proposed by Martin et al. [17] and innovative behavior of managers based on the work of De Jong and Den Hartog [18]. In addition, this study tended to focus on two real estate firms listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand because of their market capitalization and accessibility for data collection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective humor depends on the understanding of how, when and whom to be used. If managers use humor with the right proportions, it provides not only benefits for the employees and organizations, but also managers in return as well. Nevertheless, Martin et al. [17] proposed multi-dimensional conceptualization of humor in which humor can be separated into four distinctive styles. Affiliative humor refers to the use of humor to reduce the mutual distance between two parties and to develop social connection with other people. Self-enhancing humor refers to those who use humor to view their life when facing with stress or inevitable situations. Aggressive humor refers to the use of humor to make fun on the cost of others in which those untasteful humors can hurt others’ feelings. Self-defeating humor refers to the use of humor to get admittance from others by being detrimental to the self.

Numerous studies attempted to examine the relationship between managerial humor and innovative behavior, but most of these studies mainly focused on the perspectives of employees on assessing the use of humor by leaders. For instance, Tang [10] studied the relationship between use of humor by leaders and innovative behavior of Taiwanese employees. After sending questionnaires to more than 700 employees in various manufacturing companies, only 239 respondents agreed to participate in this study by returning completed questionnaires to the researcher. This study developed its own instruments to measure humorous leadership. Thus, the findings cannot be utilized for discussion in similar studies, which humor style questionnaire of Martin et al. [17] was widely used as the scale of measurement. Results of regression analyses showed that leaders’ use of humor had a significantly positive effect on employee innovative behavior. A similar study conducted by Ho et al. [11] who gathered data from Taiwan’s corporate leaders revealed that self-enhancing humor style had a significantly positive effect on innovative behavior whereas aggressive humor style had a significantly negative impact on innovative behavior of corporate leaders. Recently, Pundt [12] also found the relationship between humorous leadership and innovative behavior of German employees. Findings indicated that innovative behavior of employees was more likely to increase depending on the frequency of the humor used by leaders. Yet, this study limited its investigation only on positive humor.

Additionally, Atta-Owusu [19] examined the effect of the four types of humor including affiliative, aggressive, coping, and reframing humors used by employees in their interaction with in-group and external group colleagues on innovative behavior and performance. Data were gathered from employees in 9 Finnish organizations by using the modified version of humor style questionnaire developed by Martine et al. [17] and innovative work behavior scale compiled by De Jong and Den Hartog [20]. Factor analysis and reliability assessment were conducted to guarantee the quality of the instruments, which showed the factor loading above 0.5 and alpha scores of 0.61-0.86. After conducting survey in the fall of 2015, eighty-eight questionnaires were returned with completion. Correlation and hierarchical regression analyses were performed for data analysis and research hypotheses testing. The findings indicated that employees who used affiliative humor with both groups of employees had a positive association with innovative behavior whereas the use of aggressive humor had no significant effect on innovative behavior of the in-group employees, but had a significantly negative influence on innovative behavior of the external group employees. On the other hand, this study found no significant effects of coping and reframing humors on innovative work behavior of both groups. Recent research of Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, Atta-Owusu, and Oikarinen [14] also found that affiliative, coping, and reframing types of humor had positive associations with innovative behavior while aggressive humor were negatively correlated to innovative behavior. Amjed and Tirmzi [13] discovered the similar findings in their study in which the relationship between employees’ humor styles and creativity was found. Affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor styles were reported significantly positive influences on creativity whereas self-defeating
humor style had a significantly negative effect on employees’ creativity. In addition, Promsri [15] scrutinized the effect of humor styles used by employees on their innovative work behavior. Participants were collected from 166 employees of a selected Thai commercial bank by using a modified version of humor style questionnaire (HSQ) and innovative work behavior (IWB) as the instruments for data collection. Multiple regression analysis with stepwise method was conducted to measure whether the use of four humor styles had a significant influence on innovative work behavior of employees. Results demonstrated that only self-enhancing humor had a significantly positive influence on innovative work behavior of employees. Other humor styles – affiliative, aggressive, and self-defeating humor styles – had no significant relationships with innovative work behavior.

Based on the findings of these related literatures, this current study comprehended that humor styles could have positive and negative effects on innovative behavior. Consequently, the research hypotheses were addressed as follows:

H1: There was a statistically significant positive effect of affiliative humor style on innovative behavior.

H2: There was a statistically significant positive effect of self-enhancing humor style on innovative behavior.

H3: There was a statistically significant negative effect of aggressive humor style on innovative behavior.

H4: There was a statistically significant negative effect of self-defeating humor style on innovative behavior.

METHODODOLOGY

This current study was an exploratory study. A total of 79 managers of two real estate companies listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand was participated for data collection process in this study. The instruments for data collection consisted of 32-item of humor style questionnaire initially created by Martin et al. [17] and 10-item of innovative work behavior developed by De Jong and Den Hartog [18]. The researcher modified these two scales of measurement from a 7-point rating scales to a 5-point rating scale. Respondents were asked to rate each item of these scale to the extent in which they agreed or disagreed based on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). To ensure the quality of these instruments, content validity with index-objective congruence (IOC) method and reliability with Cronbach’s Alpha test were conducted. The IOC score of each item was greater than 0.5, which exhibited the satisfactory validity of this scale. In addition, the alpha scores of 0.732 for humor style questionnaire scale, and 0.893 for innovative work behavior scale showed the strongly acceptable of these instruments [21].

Survey questionnaires were dispersed to managers in all levels of these two companies restricted to those who worked at the headquarters of these corporations only. Data were gathered during July-August 2017 by the assistance of students in MBA program of one specific government university who presently worked as employees in these two firms. The completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher by the end of August 2017. All data were entered into the statistical analysis software for running the statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics included frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation were calculated. To test research hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was used as an inferential statistic to predict the influence of the use of humor styles by managers on innovative behavior. Also, the basic assumptions for the suitability of using multiple regression analysis were checked strictly.

RESULTS

Amongst 79 managers of two real estate companies listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand who completed the questionnaires, 50.6% of these managers were male, and 49.41% of them were female managers. For their age, 41.8% of this group was between 31-40 years old following by aged between 41-50 years (32.9%), 20-30 years (20.3%), and 50 years up (5.1%), respectively. For their education, 60.7% of these executives received a bachelor’s degree whereas 38% of them earned a master’s degree. Only 1.3% informed that they obtained just a vocational degree. About their hierarchical level, 69.9% of this group was a first-line manager, 22.8% of them were a middle manager, and 7.6% of these people were a top manager. For their work experience, 39.2% of them had 5-10 years of work experience with their organizations, 29.1% had less than 5 years of work experience, 21.5% of this group had work experience between 11-15 years, and 10.1% of them had more than 15 years of work experience with their current companies. Table 1 exhibited that ‘self-enhancing humor style’ obtained the highest mean score among the four humor styles (x̄ = 3.38, S.D. = .634) following by ‘affiliative humor style’ (x̄ = 3.34, S.D. = .489), ‘self-defeating humor style’ (x̄ = 3.05, S.D. = .487), and ‘aggressive humor style’ (x̄ = 2.89, S.D. = .512), respectively. For innovative behavior, the mean score was in the moderate level (x̄ = 3.63, S.D. = .634).
Table-1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Managers’ Humor Styles and Innovative Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humor Styles</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative Humor Style</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.489</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Enhancing Humor Style</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.463</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive Humor Style</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.512</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Defeating Humor Style</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to conducting multiple regression analysis, the basic assumptions to ensure appropriateness of using linear regression were performed cautiously. First, Shpiro-Wilk test was checked along with Q-Q plot to confirm the normal distribution. As Shpiro-Wilk test showed the p-value greater than .05 (p = .995) indicating that the sample of this study was normal shaped [22]. The Durbin-Watson was calculated to check autocorrelation in regression data, the value of 1.916 could be assumed that there was no auto-correlation [24]. In addition, multicollinearity was assessed by examining tolerance and VIF. The values of these indicators exhibited no violation in using multiple regression analysis. As all these assumptions were met, multiple regression analysis was calculated to measure if four humor styles significantly predicted innovative behavior (See Table 2). The results demonstrated that the four independent variables including affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humor styles could explain 23% of variance to innovative behavior ($R^2 = .227$, $F (4, 79) = 5.446$, p < .01). This suggested that there were other factors that could explain innovative behavior of managers that had not been incorporated in this current study. In addition, the findings indicated that affiliative humor style had a significantly positive effect on innovative behavior of managers in real estate firms ($\beta = .280$, p < .008), as did self-enhancing humor style ($\beta = .279$, p < .011). In contrast, the results did not show the significant relationships between negative humor styles and innovative behavior of Thai executives. In sum, this present study found that only positive humor styles had significant influences on innovative behavior of managers in real estate firms. The more managers used their affiliative and self-enhancing humor style, the more likely innovative behavior would be established. Based on these findings, the research hypothesis #1 and #2 were confirmed.

Table-2: Multiple Regression Analysis of Four Humor Styles on Innovative Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficient</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficient</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Collinearity Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance VIF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.014</td>
<td>.766</td>
<td></td>
<td>.010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFIL</td>
<td>3.362</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>2.628</td>
<td>992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEF_EN</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>2.617</td>
<td>917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGGES</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>-.218</td>
<td>-1.887</td>
<td>.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEF_DF</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>-.237</td>
<td>.742</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 79
$F = 5.446$  $df = 4$  $p$-value < .01  $R^2 = .227$  Adjusted $R^2 = .186$

*Significant at .05 level, **Significant at .01 level. AFFIL = Affiliative Humor, SEF_EN= Self-Enhancing Humor, AGGES = Aggressive Humor, SEF_DF = Self-Defeating Humor.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This current study aimed to examine the relationship between managerial humor and innovative behavior of managers in real estate firms listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand. The findings showed that managers preferred to majorly use self-enhancing humor styles rather than other humor styles. Also, affiliative humor style was the second most preferred style used by managers. In contrast, aggressive humor style was informed as the least preferred humor style. These findings were inconsistent with Promsri’s findings [15], which affiliative humor style was reported as the most preferred humor style of employees in Thai commercial bank. Nevertheless, this present study discovered the same results on the least preferred style in which Promsri [15] found that aggressive humor style received the lowest score among these four humor styles.

For the research hypotheses, the results confirmed hypothesis #1 and #2, which concluded that only positive humor styles were found the significant correlations with innovative behavior of managers. This supported Pundt’s findings [12] in which the statistically significant relationship between humorous leadership and innovative behavior of employees were explored. However, Pundt [12] studied only positive humor of leaders and concentrated on the perception of employees toward the humorous leadership. Differently,
this present study focused on four humor styles (both positive and negative) and innovative behavior assessed by managers. In addition, this present study partially supported the findings of Amjed and Tirmzi [13] who found the significantly positive effects of affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor on innovation. Yet, the results of this study did not confirm the part in which they discovered the significantly negative influences of self-defeating humor on creativity. Moreover, findings of this current study partly supported Ho et al. [11] who reported the influence of self-enhancing and aggressive humor styles on innovative behavior of leaders. This may be because of differences in contexts and cultures of this current study and other studies conducted in cross-cultural environments. However, when compared with the study in similar context, this present study found more humor styles that could have an effect on innovative behavior than the work of Promsri [15], which only the positive effect of self-enhancing humor on innovative work behavior of Thai employees was found. In short, this study’s findings confirmed the previous studies that positive humor styles used by leaders could have an impact on innovative behavior. Nonetheless, unlike the past studies, the absence of negative humor styles used by managers that could affect innovative behavior of managers in this study needs to be considered carefully and should be interpreted in the organizations with caution.

Based on the findings, managers in these real estate firms needed to do more practices on using positive humor styles as these helped enhance innovative behavior of managers. When they used affiliative humor judiciously, they could establish good relationships with their employees and colleagues leading to increased willingness of subordinates and coworkers to cooperate and share information that was useful for developing managers’ innovative behavior. In addition, self-enhancing humor style, when used wisely, could enable managers to confront with the difficulties, and find ways to properly get through unavoidable situations with new ideas.

Like other studies, this study has some limitations. As samples were gathered solely from managers who worked at the headquarters in two real estate firms in Thailand, the generalization of this study’s results needs to be done with caution. The expansion of sample size should be considered for the replication study. Additionally, the comparative study of companies in the same industry or different industries was recommended for the future research. Besides, the further studies should investigate other independent variables that can predict innovative behavior of managers rather than managerial humor variables. For the research implications, managers in these two real estate firms need to be provided some relevant training courses on how to use positive humor to gain the benefits for their work and enhance innovation in the workplace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
I am very thankful to Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon for research sponsorship.

REFERENCES


